

# Changing pedagogies: including indigenous epistemologies and inclusive practices

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## Abstract

This literature review looks at a variety of sources in regards to the topic of the inclusion of indigenous epistemologies within modern pedagogy. The study focusses on Māori epistemologies and is therefore grounded in the New Zealand context. A number of authors are represented in this review and various opinions are supplied.

**Keywords:** *Māori, education, epistemology, indigenous, pedagogy*



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## Introduction

The following literature review has been composed in order to gauge, and question, how indigenous epistemologies are incorporated into modern pedagogical practice and strategies used within schooling environments. As an issue that affects all teaching practice, this paper will utilise a number of sources in order to determine whether it is important to incorporate indigenous epistemologies into educational pedagogy. In addition to this, it will be explored whether this leads to inclusive in class practice, and how this has, or is, changing in the modern education system.

Once evidence from the chosen articles have been investigated, compared and summarised, a conclusion which includes possible recommendations for future investigation will be provided. This paper has a direct focus on providing informed analysis of literature with the intent of guiding graduating teachers in their formulation of pedagogies that seek to use indigenous knowledge within the class environment. These may vary from what is traditionally taught in teacher education.

The articles chosen for the literature review focus on introducing indigenous epistemology into educational systems, whether for or against the notion. Each item was read and the content and perspectives of the respective authors will be discussed. From each article a number of key notions for further discussion have been identified and these are as follows:

- Knowledge vs Education
- Identifying indigenous epistemology
- Incorporating epistemology into modern pedagogy
- Impacts on priority learners

- Impacts on all learners
- Changes that have/have not occurred

The above notions will be used as sub-headings for the remainder of this paper for ease of reading and analysis.

## Knowledge vs Education

In order to begin to understand how incorporating epistemology into pedagogy can be achieved, it is clear from the literature that distinctions need to be made between what is knowledge the learner has acquired and the knowledge sets that formal education provides. Biesta (2006) approaches this by questioning assessment models, what we assess as desirable knowledge, and whether assessment should consider the acquired experiential knowledge of the learner. Biesta states that there is a "rise of a culture of performativity" and suggests that this has led to an education system where we do "not measure what we value... [but] end up valuing what we [can] measure". For Māori, this means leaving their true selves at the classroom door as personal values are not desired measurable traits.

Biesta's ideas are echoed by Penetito (2011) when he draws upon his own schooling experiences to demonstrate how there is a disjuncture between "self and the curriculum". From Penetito's writing an unbalance between personal experience and the curriculum limits the effectiveness of the education system. In short he explains that if there is an unbalance there are two options one can take in a western model of education: sacrifice the self for purely academic pursuits, or sacrifice academic pursuits for oneself. Because of the negative discourses which plague Māori learners, in many respects it is easier to do the

latter. That is to leave school and work but maintain the essence of being Māori; community, whanau and fun.

Much of the literature that supports a more holistic approach to Māori epistemology insertion within pedagogy advocates for the maintaining of this essence. It is important to include Māori values, experiences and, connection to community and whanau, with a specific need for the education system to embrace rather than awkwardly share a space within Māori learners.

## What is indigenous epistemology?

So what exactly is Māori epistemology? Māori epistemology is not as straight forward thing, nor fix, as the insertion of Te Reo into the education system. It braids Māori tradition, tikanga, and values as well as many other things that add to the essence of being Māori. This is highlighted best in the writings of Garrick Cooper (2008) who does not explicitly advocate for the insertion of Te Reo into pedagogies that benefit Māori learners, but utilises Māori traditions to highlight shortfalls in modern pedagogies. Te Reo in many respects can be seen as a surface feature of Māori epistemology, and with the inclusion of Te Reo to the fore of modern education, Māori have not actually benefitted. In fact Māori achievement rates have remained consistently poor in comparison to their non-Māori counterparts. Cooper's approach uses the traditions of Tāwhaki and Māui to "provide social edicts that could be used to construct new ways of thinking about Māori students experiences in mainstream education". He also uses these traditions to outline the contexts that they are set in, in the Māori world view as the social 'norm' of Māori. The identification of 'norms' leads him to confidently challenge "the long-tail of underachievement". An assertion of Cooper's (2008) in regards to "the long-tail" is that we need to look at the "norms" that the "tail" is situated in, that is, whose "norms" provoke the notion of a long tail. For Māori learners it appears that they are measured against factors that are traditionally alien to them. He also poses the question whether it could be "our current ideas about and measures of progress that are inadequate".

## Epistemology and pedagogy

Cooper (2008) also explores how Te Kotahitanga, has been a plan to challenge the schooling environment as the issue, as oppose to the individual students. Te Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) begins to explore the deeper features of Māori epistemology by outlining a number of key Māori concepts that are important, but not necessarily 100% infallible, in forming positive teaching relationships with Māori students. It is written as a guide for teachers, so it can be said that it does not truly grab the essence from the perspective of the Māori learner. It also has a tendency to use Te Reo to highlight values that are important to Māori and non-Māori alike. There is a significant crossover of conceptual information between Te Kotahitanga and Kia Hiwa Ra! (Macfarlane, 2004) and in many respects Macfarlane highlights strategies for teachers who are working with Māori learners in a more Māori-epistemologically inclusive way. Returning back to Cooper (cited in Gilbert et al., 2005), he supplied a working model of how Māori epistemology can be incorporated into pedagogy by weaving narrative (in the form of traditions) into science and history topics

## Impacts on all learners

There are a number of items of literature that speak to the notion of 'what works for Māori works for everyone'. Two of the aforementioned literature articles advocate this position. These are Te Kotahitanga and Kia Hiwa Ra! Both articles of literature achieve this by making it clear that the models aren't exclusively 'Māori' models. But could this cause the specific issues facing Māori students? Do Māori need a specific model that only works for them to inspire higher levels of achievement? Either way the inclusion of a more holistic Māori Epistemology in pedagogy is certain to inspire a higher level of interest. Waera-I-te-rangi Smith's (2000) article, Māori Epistemologies inside the Curriculum, points out that at one time only universities taught Māori language and culture through anthropology streams. Then in the 1980s and 1990s there was a controversial push to include Te Reo and other Māori topics in school. Maybe it is time to follow the trends of the past and reassess and include other facets of Māori epistemology into our pedagogies. However, contrary to Smith (2000), Sayers (2015) writes that maybe we have already gone too far at the sacrifice of the equal expectations of all students. Macfarlane (2004), and Bishop, Berryman and Wearmouth (2014), insist on the need to maintain high expectations of students. Tony Sayers is of the opinion that through becoming overly 'P.C.', especially to the plight of Māori, Māori are still not achieving and have excuses to achieve even less. His article is written in a very cynical tone but his views echo many of those in wider society. Sayers starts explaining that as a teacher for many years he "had watched the tangible creep of Māori influence upon the NZ education system".

## Changes that have/have not occurred

Sayers (2015) believes that we have moved too quickly, while others believe that we haven't moved enough, and some hold the opinion the maybe we haven't moved in the right direction. But amongst all the literature reviewed one thing is certain, we have moved and there is now more Māori incorporated in the education system than ever before. But is this helping Māori to achieve? In this review it can be seen the bulk of the views are polarised in two separate camps: 1) It can be seen that, in some of the literature, the forced insertion of Te Reo (a surface feature) has only assisted in standards being lowered without the true issues of supporting Māori achievement being answered. 2) Others suggest that the use of Te Reo has assisted in other forms of Māori epistemology being incorporated into the education system. There is some consensus on the fact the Māori worldviews and concepts are equally, if not more, important to pedagogies that are considerate to, and promote, the raising of Māori achievement standards.

## Conclusion

The importance of including Māori epistemologies into modern pedagogy is a controversial issue. It is a massive issue at that. Through this literature review it can be seen that there are differences in the approach towards including Māori epistemology into pedagogy, and each view needs to be considered before making a decision on how Māori epistemologies can be implemented in the in-class pedagogical practices. Through having a debate about what knowledge is important, and valuable to the education system with the desired

outcome on a model of embracing, a pedagogy that includes holistically Māori epistemologies seems achievable. Cooper explains to a high standard what Māori epistemologies are and how they can be best fitted into the pedagogy. While Macfarlane and, Bishop and Berryman have supplied models and plans that begin to look past the surface of features of Māori epistemologies (Te Reo). Depending on which side of the fence you sit, there are also those who believe that there are benefits of extending Māori epistemology into the pedagogy, while others believe that it has already gone too far. Either way it is safe to say from the research that has been conducted that there have been definite changes, for better or worse, to the levels of epistemologies that are able to be utilised in pedagogy.

My recommendations for future research would be:

- to include a range of students/learners in the research and formulation of non-Te Reo based, Māori epistemological pedagogical models
- to consider the use of alternative methods information promulgation traditionally used by Māori, to Māori in order to extend the pool of Māori epistemology to be looked at
- to include Pasifika learners, and incorporate concepts such as Fa'a Samoa as a Samoan epistemology with the potential to raise Pasifika achievement

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